

M Mariposa
Arts Council

Trails Day Poetry

A collection from Mariposa County



PREFACE

As part of Mariposa County's celebration of National Trails Day on June 4, 2022 the Arts Council invited the community to enjoy live poetry readings, compose original poems and create artwork in response to prompts that explored personal feelings and experiences with America's trails, waterways and wild spaces. Trails Day Poetry received over 100 submissions of unique poems written by community members of all ages. This chapbook is curated by poet Megan Levad Beisner.

This special project was created in alignment with the Mariposa County Creative Placemaking Strategy, leveraging the arts to engage public spaces and recreation.

FRONT COVER

Artwork by Diane Erwin

INTRODUCTION

by Megan Levad Beisner

“Once, we were part of Outside and Outside was part of us.” This is the opening line of one of our toddler son’s recent favorite books, a meditation on how intimately our lives are connected to the natural world, even if we forget to spend time with it. Here in Mariposa County, it’s not hard to remember how much our environment affects us—we live with fires and rockslides, drought and toxic algae. But we also live with spectacular superblooms, everyday wildlife sightings, and some of the oldest trees on the planet.

Our intimacy with nature, I think, is a major component of the glue that binds our close community. Whatever our differences, we always have this in common; we share the views and the stars—and the trails.

Trails Day was an awesome celebration of what it means to live and grow together here, and this chapbook memorializes this moment in our life together at the hem of the Sierras. As you read, you’ll see poems that remind you of your own childhood, the meditations you’ve had in middle life, and the hopes you hold for our shared future.

As for my hopes? They include helping to bring more contemporary poets like Michael Mlekoday to Mariposa to read to and talk with us (their riff on Robert Hass’s “Meditation at Lagunitas” is a refreshing moment of delight), meeting more of the warm, determined people making Mariposa an amazing place to live through their hard work with small-but-mighty organizations, and discovering more trails with my family.

(Spoiler alert: Outside is always there, waiting for us to enter.)

Ursula Stock

Rhythm, Rhizome, Hymn
Trails
inviting us, life.

Rhythm, Rhizome, Hymn
Trails
guiding us, the way.

Rhythm, Rhizome, Hymn
Trails
connecting us, to all that is

Rhythm Rhizome Hymn

Ralph Mendershausen
My Kind of Trail

My kind of trail is also
A story, a river
It's not a straight line.
It takes me where others have gone
So I can go my own way

Repetition may be needed
Before what is outside
Becomes inside.

My kind of trail is both,
at the same time
known, and a path of discovery
shared, but still mine.

Better for being shared
Better for being mine
Leading me on,
Outward and within
To get in touch
With what matters.

Diane Erwin
Backpacking

Once, I'd swiftly stride
over high mountain passes.
Now, pause, gaze in awe.

Jim Cokas
Topography

Walking the trail
a light rain falling

I close my eyes
sacrificing sight
letting touch take over
- each drop a cold landing
patterning a melody
calling the skin
to attention

The drops collect until
gravity wills them into
rivulets running down
the broad plain of my
forehead
checked briefly
by the brow's bushy dams
their flow channeled
to either side
of my
nose

Across the hilly cheeks
down the jaw's sharp swoop
down the neck and
down

Fanning out
on the chest's
broad delta
reaching the heart
- finally watering
the center
of my
soul

Michael Mlekoday

Returning to the poems of Robert Hass
after gorging on wild blackberries
by the sea, bright and sagey, our fingers
staining the pages - is it always
like this, this silent, creaturly singing?

Michelle Ceballos

Sea is dark and deep
Couldn't jump in as a girl
I dive in and laugh

Canyon Carter
Student
On the Coast

Down in Isla Vista
I can feel the ocean breeze
When I learn new things

Xander
Student

Rafting is so fun
Water rushing around you
Observe the current

Tillyanna Healey
10th Grade
Missed Opportunities

The creek at my house
the fish I can't seem to catch
My hands gauge, but miss

Elvis
Student

The river flows down people
Swim down the river the
Rocks stay in place

Liam Willis
Student

Familiar trials
Reassuring nostalgia
Rippling comfort

Chris Hutcheson

Once were soaring pines
Now transformed to rocks grass oaks
A desert with trees

Carol Dewey

Branches reach wider,
The meadow more lush, in my
dreams that brought me here

K. Amstutz

That field of dreams
Widely opened my young eyes
New kids live there now.

Miguel
6th Grade

I have returned from a natural
landscape before, it was even
in my property

I was on a hike with my family
just exploring around my house
then, we saw an opening in the bushes
leading to smoke
that was rising from an ice pond

That day I felt something
different, and I'm still
not sure why I felt like that.

Hunter Johnson
10th Grade

The large playful tree
That has been a home not home
Turned to a small thought

Phyllis Becker

The creek it was a wild place
the creek when I was six
brambles, tadpoles
quicksand! In my mind.

But then when I returned
my creek, my wild creek
was gone
Buried in a culvert beneath a
vast green lawn.

Waylon Nelson
6th Grade

I was four years old when my
brother was two years old

We were playing in the pond trying
to catch tadpoles

Me and him went back there when
I was 10 and he was 8

We kinda just chilled for a little
but didn't play in the pond because
we felt too old to play in the pond.

Jhovany
Student

I walked up the trail.
Then I spotted a scrub jay
I walked back to school

Anonymous
Student

I saw a rope swing
tied to a big tree branch
But we could not swing

L.L. LaNotte-Hays

Poppies in lupines
On Mariposa Parkway
A cordial display

Evelyn Carter
Student

Past is forgotten
in endless sound, shadows dance
In nature’s poem.

Caroline Wenger Korn

Our buckeye tree waiting
Hoping all these lonely years
And then you come home

Ben Goger

Smile on me songbird, the winds going to blow
all the pedals from the flowers, into the rainbow
The light is the same, from east to the west
Under flat moon light is the best

To the highlands in springtime, is where I’m going to go
Following ribbons of woodsmoke up wet grant flows
discussing with the elders all the ancient typologies
Under flat moon light if you please

Listen to the dreaming of the ants and bees
Echoing reptiles beyond realities
Songliness in the sunrise, spirits in the trees
Under flat moonlight if you please

Maegan Matchett
10th Grade

A big rock above
head in the clouds of the sky
She sits on the ledge

Jim Cokas
Song Dogs

out under a laguna moon
bright full sphere cough in a pacific sky

walking the trail on a pleistocene beach
now humped up and fringed with sage

watching an owl fly
soundless feathered kite
pursuing the scurries of mice
in some black dance

in the dry cities of autumnal weed
cricket songs emerge and smother our hearing for a time

then at the edge of all listening
comes the voice of an old man laughing
no, a child wailing
now forward now backward

a river reaches uphill

i feel as if i am dreaming
In a language i have forgotten

<p>Carol Dewey</p>	<p>This forest floor Littered with death and life Of so many ages past and present Layer upon layer Energy upon energy A microcosm and yet a universe Feathered, furred and scaled, Ferned, mossed and flowered Here we are brother and sisters, of millennials unimaginable Within each the stuff Of stardust and dinosaurs The mark of a Greater Existence A beauty abused Whatever the future Time “grinds exceeding fine” And change is a forever given within any forest Of water, of growth Of heat and frost Of millions upon millions of years yet ahead Breathe slowly Breathe deeply For here the breath of life surrounds the willing soul.</p>	<p>Riley Poor 10th Grade <i>Freedom of the Mind</i></p>	<p>Do we as people see what our choices do? Do we as a society acknowledge that what we choose to do has a consequence? We’ve all been told the Iconic but old fashioned line, that “Your actions have consequences.”</p> <p>When the teacher asked if we Understand we all solemnly shook our head in agreement. What does that question actually mean? Do only big actions have consequences or do small choices matter as well? I wish to Have generations following us to not have to question this idea of consequence. I wish that the next generations can live as though consequences is an unneeded worry.</p>
<p>Elijah Slenders 6th Grade</p>	<p>I dream of a world so cleansed That you can almost see - through it. I dream of a world where the ocean is plastic free</p> <p>I dream of a sunny day where young kids can play in the rivers.</p> <p>I hope that all of these will come true.</p>	<p>L.L. LaNotte-Hays <i>For My Grandson Leo I Wish</i></p>	<p>Plentiful water Quenching parched California, Defeating the fire demons . . .</p> <p>Oceans without debris Plastic free Abundant with sea life and Coral reefs . . .</p> <p>Air clear and clean Easy to breathe No purifiers needed . . .</p> <p>Silent vehicles emitting nothing Harmful, Instead replenishing the Atmosphere . . .</p> <p>People living with care reestoring our world, Returning the climate to Its friendly status</p> <p>I so wish.</p>

<p>Chris Hutcheson</p>	<p>Long ago homosapiens became the lone species in genus Homo. (It is said we likely ate the others)</p> <p>When WWII regalia Carmel poet mused: “The winds from across the pacific smell of war.”</p> <p>He imagined a world without humans. A world dominated by another species Raccoons! (they have opposable thumbs) Racoons are cunning, selfish, greedy, nasty.</p> <p>It would be the same. Imagine no domination but coexistence.</p> <p>What a dream!</p>	<p>Jessie-Lee Bissell 6th Grade</p>	<p>I found myself wandering over to the place I developed at The snowy, beautiful landscape it doesn’t feel the same. Like all of the memories are gone It looks the same, but anything I ever enjoyed is different. Is this the same place I grew up in?</p>
<p>Patrick C. Student</p>	<p>We experience a duality of nature. The tranquil calm of an old-growth forest, where all feels cyclical, suddenly stands in contrast with our knowledge of its inevitable end. The decaying on the forest floor, so life giving despite its origins, is unlike our greater decay. Our ending of the cycle.</p>	<p>Shasta Conner Student</p> <p>Aaron Newman Student <i>Fighting with Ourselves</i></p>	<p>The flowing river A memory of happiness Now filled with endless fear</p> <p>If you want to choose you can The pain of change will never compare to the beauty of your future.</p> <p>If you need to change don’t blind yourself in lies. Change is beautiful but you are not the price.</p>
<p>Dameon Haines 6th Grade</p>	<p>I dream of a world where people are nice. Where kids don’t just stay on video games all day. Where there is no trash In the oceans and rivers. I dream of a world where it doesn’t matter what color skin you are.</p>	<p>Caroline Wenger Korn</p>	<p>Down the trail Schquita runs ahead wet nose reading the terrain I, too, catch the scent of tarweed and late blooming clarkia pass pomegranate planted by family generations past. I smile and perhaps they smile at us their dream of land still lives in me.</p>

Pria Wellcome Student <i>The Universe</i>	I dream a world larger than imagination I dream a world of multiple worlds I dream a world that contains multiple stars I dream a world with ongoing discovery I dream a world beyond human capability I dream the universe.
Jacob Griffith 6th Grade	Trees, rocks, clean water. Animals, coyotes, bears, Hope for no fire.
Bella Twiss Student <i>In a New World</i>	In a new world There are wildflowers blooming By the clean river flowing. In a new world There are children Running with uncontrollable laughter In our world There will be kindness Spreading in the wind of our population.

K. Amstutz	What if... there was a place for gathering of histories of people who shared a common goal: to reach heaven-on-earth kind of feeling every glorious day? What if we could close our eyes and feel the cloud - shade and mountain sun pass over our upturned faces while feeling the generations of ancestors who have travelled here, too under the same warm sun? What if the air could be so calm and still, that all we could hear would be ancient bubbles rising from deep, deep within the Earth's secret places . . . and the killdeer, luring us away from the newly hatched children as they have practiced for millenia? What if humans could work with a place to construct a shelter that belongs here, where tiny frogs and humans could gather and share ideas and connect under a well built roof, dreaming of a world where all, can thrive? Parsons 2022
Lily Rumfelt Student	What if it was perfect? But your perfect is not mine and mine is not yours This world can be many Things of amazing experience of the highest mountains and the lowest valleys. We will always come back home to the mountains and trees.

AKNOWLEDGMENTS

***Special thanks to Mariposa Trails Day Planning Committee
and Trails Day Sponsors:***

Yosemite Mariposa Tourism Bureau
Mariposa County Planning Department
Upper Merced River Watershed Council
Mariposa Yosemite Rotary
and Sierra Telephone, who made these chapbooks possible.

To all who participated in Trails Day Poetry;
to Ralph Mendershausen;
to our Trails Day guest poet Michael Mlekoday;
to students and teachers;
and to Megan Levad Beisner for program design, prompt writing,
classroom instruction and chapbook poem selection.

